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Unpacking the Debate on Climate Justice and Equity (Part II)

Citation for published version:

Savaresi, A, *Unpacking the Debate on Climate Justice and Equity (Part II): REDD+*, 2015, Web publication/site, BeneLex Blog. <<http://www.benelexblog.law.ed.ac.uk/2015/02/03/unpacking-the-debate-on-climate-justice-and-equity-part-ii-redd/>>

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publisher Rights Statement:

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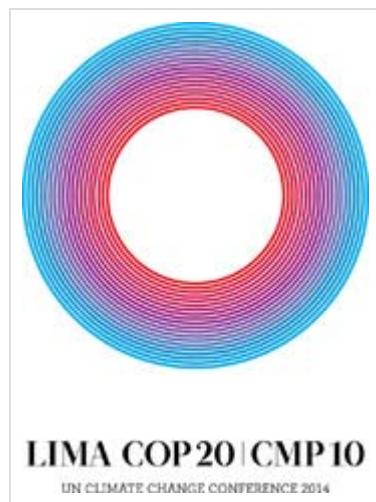
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Unpacking the Debate on Climate Justice and Equity (Part II): REDD+

Posted on [February 3, 2015](#) by [Annalisa Savaresi](#)



By Annalisa Savaresi

February 2015: In addition to addressing equity questions raised by climate change impacts ([BENELEX blogpost: Unpacking the Debate on Climate Justice and Equity, Part I](#)), the burgeoning debate on climate justice has focused on how to temper the effects of climate change response measures on the vulnerable. The most significant developments have so far occurred in connection with [REDD+](#) and featured prominently at the 2014 Lima Climate Conference. While no progress with negotiations on REDD-related items on the conference's agenda was made, numerous side-events showcased early experiences with devising and implementing REDD+ benefit-sharing arrangements. This blogpost reviews evidence emerging from these experiences, reflecting on the equity implications of REDD+ negotiations in 2015.

Key equity questions concerning REDD+

As recalled in earlier blogposts, equity concerns have resulted in the adoption of [safeguards](#) to avoid the negative impacts of REDD+ activities and secure the generation of non-carbon benefits ([BENELEX blogpost: Climate Change and Forests: Benefit-sharing Perspectives](#)). In turn, these have been translated into specific benefit-sharing requirements (see [BENELEX blogpost: The Operationalization of Benefit-sharing in REDD+](#)). Benefit-sharing arrangements are being used as a means to designate who gets rewarded for REDD+ activities, and under what conditions. Fundamental equity questions concern the identification of benefits and beneficiaries.

Benefits

REDD+ activities are expected to provide a host of monetary and non-monetary benefits. A new [CIFOR book](#) presented on the sidelines of the Lima Conference, shows that the focus so far has been overwhelmingly on monetary benefits. The book reports a host revenue-sharing arrangements for REDD+ activities, targeted at the individual, household and community levels. However, as seen with similar discussions under the Nagoya Protocol, monetary benefits are estimated to be less likely in the short term; whereas non-monetary benefits may become more quickly and readily available (see [BENELEX blogpost: Benefit-sharing and Traditional knowledge: the Need for International Guidance](#)).

On non-monetary (*aka* non-carbon) benefits (e.g. biodiversity conservation, or secure land and resource tenure), another [CIFOR study](#) reports a variety of approaches to enhance local wellbeing and livelihoods, including: the creation of markets for sustainable forest products; support for the development of a sustainable forest-based economy; support for alternative livelihood activities; the strengthening of capacity to deliver education and health services in remote areas; community training on financial services (credit, loan, micro-financing); and financial support and training for communities to raise funds to support livelihood enhancements.

The study also reveals that social benefits receive higher priority than biodiversity-related benefits. Identified examples of the latter include: conducting research on, and quantification and valuation of local biodiversity through collaboration with expert research institutions; determining high-value conservation areas; and promoting law enforcement schemes. How these benefits may be monitored and reported in practice, however, largely remains unclear.

In this regard, a recent [Forest Dialogue report](#) notes that REDD+ was initially designed to achieve a single, defined outcome — reduced greenhouse-gas emissions — and REDD+ benefits were expected to be shared on the basis of performance against this defined outcome. With the inclusion of non-carbon benefits, however, the basis for sharing benefits, and who is entitled to those benefits, has become increasingly uncertain.

Beneficiaries

There is a multitude of possible beneficiaries from REDD+ activities. A 2013 paper by [Luttrell et al.](#) identifies six main options:

- benefits go to actors with legal rights related to land/forest and/or carbon ('legal rights' rationale)
- benefits go to those who reduce emissions ('emission reductions' rationale)
- benefits go to forest stewards ('stewardship' rationale)
- benefits go to actors incurring costs ('cost-compensation' rationale)
- benefits go to facilitators of implementation ('facilitation' rationale)
- benefits go to the poor ('pro-poor' rationale).

Evidence gathered through [CIFOR studies](#) relying on this typology suggests that so far the focus has been on legal right holders and/or investors incurring costs, rather than traditional

forest stewards. Decision-making and discussions on REDD+ and benefit-sharing tend to be dominated by powerful groups (e.g. government agencies and donors) with limited participation of traditional forest stewards (e.g. indigenous peoples). In this state of affairs, benefits rarely reach the poorest and most marginalized.

A [Forest Dialogue report](#) illustrates how heated debates centre on whether and how monetary benefits should be retained by governmental agencies bearing the costs for implementing REDD+ activities. In some cases, such as that of Mexico, central governments have agreed to bear the costs of REDD+, leaving local stakeholders to enjoy the monetary benefits. The approach undertaken by Mexico, however, seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

More generally, [Pascual et al.](#) reflect on the inadequate appreciation of social equity in the design of REDD+ payment schemes. According to the authors, social equity dimensions — including the ability to participate in and shape REDD+ schemes, the recognition of diverse local rights, and the fair distribution of costs and benefits — are often overlooked in the design of REDD+, with negative impacts on ecological outcomes and project costs.

Another [report](#) by The Nature Conservancy and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) emphasizes the need to move away from an approach whereby REDD+ benefits are viewed as mere payments for stakeholders, towards creating incentives and support for transitions to low-carbon, 'green economy' models that promote economic development and job creation.

These studies indicate that there is a need for greater conceptual clarity on benefit-sharing arrangements under REDD+, distinguishing instances where benefit-sharing is a mere form of compensation, from those where it is a reward for specific activities. There is furthermore a need to better ascertain the way in which States exercise the wide margin of discretion that UNFCCC guidance presently leaves them in addressing equity considerations associated with REDD+.

The debate at forthcoming climate negotiations

In June 2015, UNFCCC Parties will debate the non-carbon benefits of REDD+ and guidance on information to be included in REDD+ safeguard information systems. In particular, they will have to decide whether there is a need to further specify the types of information that Parties ought to provide on the implementation of safeguards.

Views on this issue at the Lima Climate Conference were rather polarized. Some Parties resisted the idea of further guidance, emphasizing that the implementation of safeguards should be country-driven and respect the sovereignty of countries hosting REDD+ projects. They argued that existing guidance provides sufficient elements for those undertaking REDD+ activities and seeking result-based payments. Other Parties, instead, insisted that further guidance is necessary to secure the transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of safeguard information systems, indicating support for exploiting synergies between REDD+ and other international forest-related processes ([FCCC/SBSTA/2014/MISC.6](#)).

The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), for its part, made a [submission](#) emphasizing synergies between REDD+ and national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs). The submission draws attention to the considerable overlap in the information that can support implementation of both REDD+ strategies and national targets within NBSAPs, suggesting that identification of these potential overlaps could help maintain consistency in policy development. The submission furthermore says that if the same social, environmental and economic indicators are used for both REDD+ and NBSAPs, this may help avoid duplication of efforts in generating this information.

Several civil society submissions emphasized equity-related concerns. In particular, [indigenous peoples' organizations](#) drew attention to the need to ensure that REDD+ benefits go to those who have historically sustained forest conservation.

A decision on this guidance for information to be included in safeguard information systems has been made somewhat more urgent by the fact that the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Board has agreed on an [initial model framework](#) for REDD+ result-based payments. The model acknowledges that the submission of safeguard information system summary reports is a prerequisite for REDD+ payments. The framework, however, does not say how the content of these reports will be assessed or followed up. Presently, GCF [standards](#) to tackle the adverse impacts of funded activities and maximize environmental and social benefits only make generic reference to the provision of “development benefits and opportunities” for indigenous peoples and “cultural heritage holders.” In the case of REDD+, however, implementation of these GCF standards would need to be in line with specific requirements included in REDD+ safeguards.

The outcome of this debate is crucial to ascertain the equity implications of REDD+. Safeguard information systems are in fact the only UNFCCC tool to provide international scrutiny over how equity considerations are addressed in REDD+ activities. This is especially important in connection with non-carbon benefits. As discussed in an earlier [BENELEX blogpost](#), UNFCCC Parties are still in the process of debating what non-carbon benefits are; whether they should be reported and monitored, and if so how; and whether non-carbon benefits should attract specific payments. Parties' opinions have greatly diverged. While some Parties argue that non-carbon benefits should be considered an integral part of REDD+ safeguards, others argue that they are a collateral issue that should not be reported in the context of safeguard information systems, and, most crucially, should be addressed in other *fora* with relevant mandates, such as the CBD, the GCF or the FCPF ([FCCC/SBSTA/2014/MISC.4](#)). So far the UNFCCC COP has not seized the opportunity to build upon the growing body of international law and practice on benefit-sharing as a means to address the significant intra-State equity questions associated with REDD+. Studies on the implementation of REDD+ activities, however, provide ample evidence suggesting that there is a need for greater international guidance.

Outlook

Ensuring equity in REDD+ activities depends in the last instance on who will benefit, for what and how. This is not a matter arising only with regard to REDD+, and indeed applies across all climate finance. The experience with REDD+, however, is particularly significant

as this is the first instance in which UNFCCC Parties adopted requirements to ensure that some basic equity considerations are taken into account in the implementation of climate response measures, rather than leaving this matter to implementing States and financing agencies. Still, there is a great deal of uncertainty on how REDD+ benefits can be incentivized, identified or measured under the UNFCCC.

Evidence from the early implementation of REDD+ activities reveals that the understanding of REDD+ benefit-sharing tends to focus on monetary benefits, and that substantive and procedural equity considerations are being overlooked. In this connection, a [Forest Peoples Programme report](#) presented on the sidelines of the Lima Climate Conference specifically recommends placing forest-dependent communities' customary land rights and other human rights centre-stage in REDD+ efforts.

As UNFCCC Parties consider non-carbon benefits and guidance on REDD+ safeguard information systems, the evidence emerging from the [studies](#) presented at the Lima Climate Conference suggests that a pro-poor and inclusive approach to REDD+ benefit-sharing is not only “a good thing to do” but also “essential for achieving optimal outcomes.”

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